DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 139 353 HE 008 974

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TITLE Faculty Views of the University's Organizational Legitimacy. A Case Study.
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 23p.; Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Change; Case Studies; *College Faculty; *Job Satisfaction; Organizational Change; *Organizational Climate; *Organizational Theories; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Morale; *Universities

ABSTRACT

By using a scoring device, a university's faculty was found to be divided according to contentment or discontentment with the institution's organizational climate. The groups are shown to have held different perceptions of several aspects of university life. By linking the findings to a framework derived from organizational theory, the possible consequences of the faculty's attitudinal split are discussed. One of the possibilities is that universities may tend toward organizational rigidity in response to faculty discontent. It is suggested that further study be undertaken, especially through comparison of institutions. The data also suggest that common assumptions about faculty participation norms and antipathy toward administration be reexamined. (Author/MSE)

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Faculty Views of the University's Organizational Legitimacy: A Case Study

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HE008974

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Faculty Views of the University's

Organizational Legitimacy: A Case Study

Abstract

A scoring device is introduced by which two groups of a single University's faculty were defined, along lines of discontentment and contentment with the institution's organizational style. The respective groups are shown to have held differentiated perceptions of several aspects of University life. Linking the findings to a framework derived from general organization theory, possible consequences of the faculty's attitudinal split are noted. One of the possibilities is that universities may develop continually toward organizational rigidity in response to pressures generated by discontented elements. Types of faculty are associated with discontented and contented feelings.

Findings are phrased in a way which conduces to further study, especially through comparative analysis. It is suggested that particularly the large land-grant state universities may tend to have similar characteristics. The data also suggest that qualifications should be held regarding usual assumptions about faculty participation norms and professionalistic personnel's antipathy toward administration.

Faculty Views of the University's Organizational Legitimacy: A Case Study

Introduction

Faculty discontentment has been underscored in investigations and writings done from numerous viewpoints. In recent years the topic has been tied to such important matters as faculty unionization, employment attrition and movement, and internal processes of organization and participation. Yet literature on universities is only beginning to build in regard to the issues at hand. Conclusions are by no means crystallized about the nature and consequences of the faculty-institution relationship.

The present report views faculty discontment as an empirical question to be addressed through lenses of organization theory, an approach which has been given relatively short shrift. The focus is on faculty members' perceptions of organizational characteristics of a University. The element of primary interest is their interpreting internal processes and structures as legitimate or illegitimate. Legitimacy and illegitimacy are terms used in organization theory to refer to concepts broader than members' subjectively held senses of contentment/discontentment. The legitimacy variable is a factor which intertwines with other aspects of an organization and which bears on institutional health. An important legacy of theoretical development is a widely accepted idea that subordinates' subjective attitudes condition whether and in what ways authority is effective. Legitimacy might be accorded to or withheld from the formally charged authority roles; it might be redirected to other organizational roles or be based on criteria other than those

stemming from the logic of the institution's arrangement and purposes. A high instance of illegitimacy feelings is part of a syndrome of organizational dysfunctionality, according to the more standard interpretations. However, the nature of this dysfunctionality is envisioned differently among several schools of thought. Some scholars treat illegitimacy as a serious detraction from a necessary high degree of formal authority. Others see it as a not unwarranted reaction against inappropriate or excessive involvements by higher strata, or against their inept means of achieving influence.

Regardless of one's theoretical orientation, it is important to understand legitimacy and illegitimacy feelings. Equipped with this and other elements of basic insight, scholars can with some confidence proceed to devise descriptive and prescriptive university models, and speculate more soundly on ultimate issues about university viability. With this theoretical issue and the inconclusiveness of university literature in mind, observations were made in a single University.

A dichtomy of perceptions emerged in the preliminary research. The discontented faculty members seemed to share a series of sentiments the composite of which can be stated as follows:

> Power tends to emanate from upper hierarchical levels, where the administrative echelon performs too much according to their own discretionary judgments, and this situation is intolerable from the point of view of academic values.

Others, the contented faculty members, seemed to disagree with this image. Since the split attitudes occurred in a single organization, it was de-

sirable to probe more deeply into the same institution.

Research Design

The attitude discovered in the preliminary study to be held by the discontented faculty were reminiscent of findings by Michel Crozier (1964) in his study of French bureaucracies. A sense of illegitimacy was directed toward the exercise of "power" as he defined it: Unbounded by rules, others (especially administrators) made and enforced judgments of dubious merit on their own discretion. Additional ingredients of disgruntlement in the University were compatible with the image which Crozier had described. Upper echelons seemed to these members to hold the advantage in power, in a structure which was seen as centralized and as "stacked" against members' viewpoints.

This package of perceptions was the present study's dependent variable, operationalized as agreement/disagreement with twenty-one Likert scale statements concerning the presence of these elements. Responses to the statements proved interrelated in a way which both formed a Guttman scale (with a coefficient of 90.3 by Goodman's technique) and showed item by item correlations which were all significant at the .05 level. A score of 2 was given for each response which indicated an illegitimacy orientation, 1 for neutral/non-response, and 0 for a legitimacy orientation. Each individual's scores on the twenty-one items were totaled, and the respondents were rank-ordered according to their total scores. Two groups were defined -- illegitimacy and legitimacy-oriented -- by dividing the faculty members at the median point of the rank order. One-third of the respondents scored between 0 and 14, indicating that a sizeable proportion tended to make responses of a

quite favorable or positive nature concerning the University organization. (The statements utilized in the operational definition of the dependent variable appear in Appendix A.)

A mail-out questionnaire containing these statements and items concerning other attitudinal variables was administered. Additional data were taken from the University's personnel records. Five hundred faculty members of a population of one thousand ninety-nine were randomly selected from a roster of faculty personnel (all those with teaching and/or research assignments). One hundred fifty-six individuals returned questionnaires which were completed sufficiently to use in analysis.

To facilitate a check of the representativeness of the questionnaires completed and returned, a test group of thirty faculty members was selected separately from the larger group of four hundred seventy persons. The group of thirty and the larger group were chosen independently of each other, each by means of a table of random numbers. A response rate of one-third of the total, combined sample was expected, since that had been the return rate of the preliminary study. The smaller sub-sample initially returned at this expected rate, but for these members follow-up letters and telephone calls elicited a final return rate of ninety per cent. The responses of the smaller group with a high return were compared with the larger group's responses in which only one-third completed and returned questionnaires. It is feasible to argue that since the two samples did not diverge significantly on most variables, the total respondent group was not unrepresentative of the total population of faculty members at the subject University. The effort, however, was not to depict the University's profile, but to test relationships between variables for individuals.

Whether the respondents constituted a representative sample is irrelevant to this end.

This report does not identify the subject University by name, as a courtesy to the institution. Some of its characteristics should be noted, however, in order to facilitate the reader's appraisal of the findings. The University was formed in a southwestern state as a land-grant college in the late 1800s, and grew especially since the 1950s in that tradition. Prominent elements in it include applied fields such as engineering and agriculture, professionally oriented graduate programs, and extension services. There are approximately seventy departments and twelve hundred faculty members serving sixteen thousand students, one-fourth of them post-graduates.

Responses on each of several statements concerning independent variables were tallied for the groups identified as illegitimacy- and legitimacy-perceivers. Chi-square and in some cases Kruskal-Wallis calculations were used to test whether responses on these statements were related to illegitimacy/legitimacy perceptions. The .05 level of significance was used. Data formats are too bulky to be presented in this article. Forty-six contingency tables, most of them containing several Likert scale statements, response tallies and statistical figures, appear in the author's fuller report. (Marshall, 1975)

Findings: Elements of Perception

Additional elements of the Crozierian image were associated with the senses of legitimacy/illegitimacy as operationally defined. Those perceiving illegitimate power relationships in the University also viewed

it as an "illiberal" setting. Components of illiberality which figure in Crozier's discussion include "bureaucraticness" of derogatory connotations such as rigidity and cumbersomeness, the application of sanctions rather than persuasion to achieve compliance, and intolerance of deviancy. Crozier suggests that where the setting is "liberal" in these regards, personnel will not evince that sensitivity toward power which he discovered in his own studies. Here, actors' responses to statements purporting illiberality/liberality did associate as expected with their views concerning the illegitimacy/legitimacy variable.

An hypothesis derived from Crozier's theory was that a power situation stimulates a desire to check the power. Those who perceived illegitimacy did wish to restrain administrators' prerogatives. Desires for other types of reform measures also emerged from the data. Illegitimacy perceivers preferred to rectify the imbalance of power through decentralization and an enhanced faculty role. For this group, the desire to countervail against illegitimate power involved more than approving reformist ideas. They also endorsed extra-channel activities as means of articulating the values of their stratum. The extra-channel activities most supported were: by-passing "bottlenecks" in the formal structure, dramatizing positions <u>via</u> the press, and appealing to the AAUP; few sentiments strongly favoring faculty unionization were expressed.

Perhaps more interesting were findings about intra-faculty strains. A core element of the scene which Crozier found is the prevalence of tensions, running in every direction throughout the organization. In the study at hand, those who interpreted the organization as illegitimate and power-ridden also envinced more awareness of tension -- vertically between

levels, horizontally between subdivisions of equal levels, and among faculty members themselves.

Particular attention was given to this last tension set. Evidently a side-effect of the illegitimacy perception was a resentment that some faculty colleagues get preferred treatment. Given the context that he perceived arbitrariness in the University's processes, and given that his main sphere of attention was on matters pertaining to his own stratum's activities, "illegitimacy" seems to have connoted in large part one's seeing special benefits being given to some of his colleagues. Since preferential treatments often occur outside the bounds of rules -- i.e., through "informal relations," those who resented preferential treatment of others also inclined to distrust informal processes. Accordingly, those who were resentful wanted the rules to be more adequate and binding in regard to proscribing favoritism.

This kind of intra-stratum tension comprises a major aspect of the syndrome which Crozier calls the "bureaucratic vicious circle." Ultimately those who feel that they suffer in power relationships desire to have rules and regulations built further -- not only against the discretionary field of administrative actions but also against their colleagues who benefit from the exercise of administrators' discretionary judgments. A supreme irony is involved. Although illegitimacy perceivers dislike both bureaucratic rigidity and arbitrariness, their pursuit of remedies for the latter may involve measures which lead ultimately to the former problem.

Ramifications of the negative attitudes held by one group of faculty are potentially of serious consequence. To the extent that such perceptions are pervasive and stimulate faculty action, one might expect a chain

of events similar to that of Crozier's vicious circle: inter- and intra-stratum struggling, leading to increasing rigidification, a continuing disenchantment with university administration, constant pressure from lower strata for changes in structure and process, and faculty efforts to gain influence over superiors and peers by even extra-channel means. Crozier's prediction of the vicious circle derives from his positing that organizations are in fact illegitimate power situations. However, this study's data indicated that whether illegitimate power relations dominate is a matter of members' interpretation, and that among this study's respondents the interpretation was far from being consensual. It is nonetheless important to note the possibility that organizational strife may emanate from that section of personnel who regard their University in terms of the Crozierian syndrome and resent it.

Findings: Explanations for the Perceptions

"Explanation" is the sense employed here lies in finding characteristics of the respondents which vary concomitantly with their interpretation of University illegitimacy/legitimacy. Several types of explanatory variables emerged.

Feelings of personal inefficacy vis-a-vis the University were evidently implicated heavily in the syndrome. Respondents who regarded the University as an illegitimate setting tended more than the others to think of themselves as involved in tensions and as being relatively impotent in dealings about them. They inclined to sense that they had little personal influence. They were also dissatisfied with opportunities for personal professional development. The associations of these attitudes were among the study's strongest relationships by Chi-square standards.

However, the package of negative attitudes was apparently not tantamount to total alienation from the University. Illegitimacy-perceiving faculty were less estranged in regard to social involvements, support of University activities, and attentiveness to organizational processes. Also, illegitimacy perceivers were more, not less, inclined to participate in decision-making processes. The data did not clarify reasons behind these rather surprising discoveries. Perhaps the adage, "familiarity breeds contempt" might apply. One's involvement in various aspects of institutional life may alert him to more of the University's unsavory qualities.

An interesting corollary is that faculty who were professionalistic to the extent of being "cosmopolitan" -- of being aloof from the specific institution -- were to some degree more inclined to view the University as a legitimate setting. Thus, some reservations are in order about the applicability of this aspect of professionalism's theoretical association with illegitimacy feelings. (Gouldner, 1958) The local/cosmopolitan distinction among the University faculty seems less important as an explanation of illegitimacy/legitimacy perceptions than distinctions concerning professional function and academic field.

Those who indicated that their main activity was personal research and publishing tended to be the most inclined to sense illegitimacy. However, those who emphasized their primary role as undergraduate teachers ran a close second in this regard. Faculty who indicated other primary functions -- graduate teaching, organized or institutional research, service, and work of an administrative nature -- were significantly more inclined than the first two groups to consider the University a situation of legitimacy. The principal functions of undergraduate teaching and personal publication are

linked for a rather standard and numerous group of academic persons in universities generally. That this populous category tended to be more sensitive to illegitimate power relations is of interest.

A variable which also helped explain differences in legitimacy/illegitimacy perception was type of academic field. Three basic field types were discernible and relevant as variables. "Applied" fields such as practical sciences were often said to enjoy a special status in the University, "Humanities" (including social sciences) a weak status, and "Science" (theoretical) a middle position. No significant difference in orientation to the University occurred between Humanities and Science fields, but each was significantly different in this regard when compared against Applied fields. Members of the latter group were more inclined to regard the University as a legitimate setting.

A caveat should be raised concerning the extension of these findings to other universities. The professional types who in this study were more disenchanted with the organization are prevalent, often dominant, in many universities. Yet it would seem unwarranted to extrapolate from the present data that illegitimacy feelings are always abundant among undergraduate teachers in humanities, social sciences and sciences fields who feel pressed to do personal research. The present study concerns a situation where institutional values were apparently felt by illegitimacy perceivers to be over-extended toward the leading emphases of the land-grant philosophy of applied teaching, service activities and organized practical research.

Another variable concerns the individual's status in the organization. Persons higher in rank, with tenure, and with roles in graduate education and committees tended more than their counterparts to regard the University

as a legitimate one. The statistical relationships were rather weak, however. Of these variables, the matter of lower academic rank was most strongly associated with illegitimacy feelings. The thinking behind the hypothesis was that higher status would lend to relatively effective dealings in the organization, hence positively affect one's sentiments about its legitimacy.

Findings: Reservations About Faculty Participation

Lower-level influence in the form of faculty power is frequently underscored in the literature as a major issue in universities. The desire for more faculty influence was included in this study's dependent variable. It was indeed the illegitimacy perceiver who wanted more faculty power than appeared to him to exist.

Much of the literature concerning faculty participation norms focuses on the matter of participation in the actual shaping of policy. It seems to be presumed that this is what faculty participation is all about, and further that this is what faculty members want. Not much attention has been paid by researchers and polemical writers to the possibility that involvement in policy making *per se* is not necessarily what the norm entails. An interesting question comes to mind. How strong is the desire of faculty members to participate in the actual shaping of policy? Is it likely that even those who sense and resent power would eschew this high degree of involvement and opt only to be able to challenge policies as issues arise on an *ad hoc* basis?

The data shed some light on the matter. A question purported to discern meanings and degrees of faculty participation: "Which is more important?: a) Faculty's shaping details of policy, b) Faculty's challenging policies

made by administrators and committees, and c) Neither should be overdone." Within the illegitimacy-perceiving group, there was no significant tendency to choose a) over b) and very few choices of c). On the other hand, their counterparts tended to want no "overdoing" in participation of either sort [choice c)].

It would seem hazardous, then, to assert that there is a strong faculty norm regarding faculty participation. Even the advocates of faculty influence did not necessarily advocate the faculty's deciding policy. Explanations may be ventured concerning the frequent preference among illegitimacy perceivers for challenging rather than shaping policy. Many writers about the American culture remark on the prevalent norm of "due process." (Crozier, 1964) The term entails several elements of meaning. Participation or at least equitable representation in the formulation of policy is one of the elements. But often of importance are two other elements: equality of treatment in the administration of policy, and the desirability of the substance of policy. Due process does not typically become a crucial issue unless violations of these latter elements occur.

One might therefore expect that the arenas where violations of due process occur would tend to preoccupy members of organizations. It seems feasible that an organization member would become upset most often where he evaluates the effects of policy and of the administration of policy. Over time he would become accustomed to thinking largely in terms of challenging policy and administration. As he did so, he would not be so inclined to define his ideal role as one of actually shaping policy; he would become more vigilant as a checking force than as a legislator. That a sizeable portion of faculty members appeared to define their role as challengers would perhaps

confirm this interpretation.

That another sizeable segment chose on the other hand a policy-shaping role preference may reflect their internalization of the participation norm to its fuller extent. Another possibility is that the advocates of policy-shaping may have been so resentful of the University's power structure that they felt a need to go beyond the first stages in due process of merely challenging decisions. Respondents who marked the policy-shaping response were compared by the Kruskal-Wallis method to those who chose merely to challenge. The statistic is 14.27, a significant relationship which indicates that policy-shaping associated with higher score on illegitimacy orientation.

The main line of difference between illegitimacy- and legitimacy-perception concerning participation desires of either sort can be partly explained on the basis that legitimacy perceivers tended to resent the time required to participate. By the operational definition of legitimacy feelings, they felt that participation was sufficiently frequent and effective, and they did not advocate more of it. Responses to one item in particular demonstrated the interesting finding that participation was something of a burden to the legitimacy-perceiving faculty member. The statement was, "We have too much participation now. Committee meetings and the like eat up too much of my time." Illegitimacy-perceiving respondents disagreed significantly more often than did their counterparts. At any rate, the data provided grounds for considerable doubt regarding the supposedly firm norm of faculty power.

Relevance for Further Inquiry

The dependent variable comprised attitudinal data which patterned in

a way which allowed the scoring of respondents, the higher scores appearing to indicate a high degree of sensitivity to what the respondents thought of as an illegitimate power structure, and the lower scores indicating a favorable interpretation of the same institutional setting. These attitudinal components were thought of in terms of Michel Crozier's image of a power-struggling organizational syndrome which may produce dysfunctional institutional patterns. While it is of importance that the Crozierian image was held in the minds of a large group of faculty members, it is also noteworthy that a roughly equal number of faculty members did not perceive their setting in these terms.

The dichotomization of attitudes along these lines indicates the utility of Crozier's theory as an heuristic device for studying American universities. The dimensions of his syndrome provide a viable operational definition of illegitimacy/legitimacy perceptions. That other attitudes associated quite well with these perceptions confirms the heuristic value of his scheme. The related attitudes include perceptions of an organizational context similar to the context in Crozier's study, attitudes reflecting a predisposition to react as Crozier's subjects did, and sentiments which indicated disenchantment with the organization.

Further study might fruitfully streamline the item content of the scale concerning illegitimacy/legitimacy perception. Study in additional university contexts would help to ascertain the items' applicability elsewhere. Along with a developing confidence in a measure of illegitimacy/legitimacy for university organizations can come further insights into causes and consequences.

The subject University is one of a subtype which includes growing state universities confronted by external demands for especially a role in practical

and applied knowledge. That a dichotomy of perceptions occurred here may be attributed largely to circumstances which are expectable in this subtype of university. Some faculty members, though not all, sensed both an imbalance toward administrative power and an imbalance in that academic fields other than their own were dominant.

Possible alternative pictures of other universities might be discovered. Illegitimacy might be less pronounced where imbalances of power and program emphasis are not perceived by significant numbers of faculty members. Or, the negative orientation might be significantly present but associated with factors other than those found here. Studies which profile universities according to proportions of discontented faculty might discern types of situations where they are few in number or prevalent. Perhaps through such comparisons a typology of universities could evolve and theories could be advanced concerning causal influences, and speculations made about consequences.

Continued study along these lines could also feed important insights back into the body of organization theory. An item of particular theoretical interest appears in these data. A simplistic linkage of illegitimacy feelings with professionalism was shown to be unwarranted. There was a split of feelings among persons of what is at root the same profession, and this occurred in the single context of one institution. A side issue has been noted, that the theoretically less professionally-oriented person did not tend more to view the organization as legitimate. Further study might disclose that differences in illegitimacy/legitimacy perception can be attributed to different degrees and types of professional commitment, varying qualities of socialization experiences regarding the academic pro-

fession, or different kinds of social and professional interaction patterns.

That modern organizations supposedly feature a norm that the professional member should have influence in basic matters is also of theoretical interest. Perceptions that violations of this democratic norm occurs appear to figure in illegitimacy feelings. The presence of the democratic norm may create an inordinate preoccupation with university illegitimacy as compared with the problem in other types of organization. Yet the norm was not a strong one according to the present data. Further study of the participative norm is warranted.

Another item of theoretical import concerns the nature of superior-subordinate relationships. Problems of maintaining authority through legitimacy are typically treated as resulting from and/or leading to strains regarding coordinated and interdependent activities; i.e., the "boss's" impact on specific goal-related activities. This quality of super- and subordinate interaction, however, does not adequately describe the university. The sense of legitimacy in this study seems more often threatened by administrative roles of a more distant sort -- budgetary allocations are a few steps removed from a direct "bossing" relationship; much administrative activity is in "auxiliary" areas. Perhaps, then, illegitimacy's theoretical consequences, such as a reduced coordinative ability, are not so applicable to universities. But if not these consequences, what? The possibility has been underscored of Crozier's bureaucratic vicious circle toward dysfunctional rigidity and disabling power struggles, but it too is a matter for empirical inquiry. While many perplexing questions remain, both in regard to universities and to general theory, the orientation of the present research should prove beneficial to their pursuit.

APPENDIX A
Statements Used in Operational
Definition of Illegitimacy/Legitimacy Perception

Concerning Arbitrariness:

1. "Administrative power" prevails. Officials tend to determine policy and to act on the basis of their own judgment and criteria. Imbalances, unsound policies or arbitrary actions result.

2. Here, administrators' arbitrariness tends to hinder proper academic functioning.

3. "They" (administrators and authoritative committees) often ignore policies and rules in order to play favorites or to control the University the way "they" want to.

4. On the contrary (to item listed as no. 3, above), policies and rules are firm enough to prevent such "administrative power."*

5. Implementation of policies is fair, not arbitrary.*

Concerning Centralization:

6. Departments can "take liberties" in the administration of policies which are set at higher levels.*

7. Departments can formally and effectively initiate policies.*

8. The department has a great deal of autonomy.*

9. Rather than having influence on policy per se, the department head merely administers policies which are made "higher up."

Concerning Faculty Influence:

10. Conflicts are resolved through processes which consider each party's position, desires, or point of view.*

11. Formal processes exist for "feedback" concerning policies per se,

or the way in which they are administered.*

12. Faculty bodies formally influence policy guidelines (via the general faculty or faculty committees).*

13. The outcome of such "struggles" (as are described in the questionnaire) is usually satisfactory to the faculty members who are involved.*

Concerning Value Conflicts:

14. No conflicts occur between the values of my particular profession and the practices or emphases of this University.*

15. Professors here need not worry about losing their "academic freedom."*

16. Professors' individual rights, wishes or needs are often ignored or violated.

17. This University responds too much to selected "outside" influences such as business, professional and political groups. Academic values are "lost in the shuffle."

18. Faculty interests are protected by the policies.*

19. Policies are sound from an academic point of view, or on the basis of professional criteria.*

Concerning Desire to Increase Faculty Influence:

20. Increase faculty authority toward making more actual policy, or at least to initiate more and firmer guidelines for administrators to follow.

21. The faculty should be involved more than now in making actual policy, by referenda or through general faculty meetings.

22. The faculty should be more involved than now through more representation on more committees.

Concerning Evaluation of Administrative Performance:

23. "Administrative power" is appropriate and is well exercised here.*

* An asterisk indicates that an illegitimacy-oriented response is to disagree with the statement.

Items 6 and 9 did not correlate with all of the remaining items, and so were omitted from the set of twenty-one statements employed in scoring for the dependent variable.

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